

# FEDERATION

## NEWS SHEET

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*The translation of the Holy Scriptures of the Czech Brethren of the sixteenth century*

WORLD'S STUDENT CHRISTIAN FEDERATION

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## STAFF NEWS

*Marie-Jeanne de Haller* has been in the office since her return from Canada in April, with the exception of a brief visit which she made to Berlin with Philippe Maury. She will leave the Federation at the end of June, and will be married in Geneva on July 27. At the time of her departure from the staff, of which she has been a member for more than nine years, we wish her and John Coleman Godspeed.

*Kyaw Than* arrived in Geneva from Burma early in April, and has remained there for most of the time since, making plans for the Federation Chalet to be held in Finland in August. In late June he made a trip to Holland to attend two conferences of the Dutch S.C.M. He was also a member of the Federation delegation which met in Vienna for several days with representatives of the International Union of Students.<sup>1</sup> He will be the Federation delegate to the Annual Assembly of World University Service in Istanbul, Turkey, in July, before going to the Chalet.

*Harry Daniel* is still in India preparing for his visit to Korea. He has been visiting various branches of the Indian S.C.M. and has taken part in the Study Conference of the Madras-Vellore section. He has recently accepted the invitation of the Indian S.C.M. to become its General Secretary beginning in January, 1954. We extend to him our best wishes in this new responsibility.

*Valdo Galland* has continued his tour of North and Central America in recent weeks. During his visit to Canada and the United States he conferred with heads of mission boards and other church and S.C.M. leaders interested in student work in Latin America. During his visits in Mexico, where he was one of the leaders in an S.C.M. retreat during Holy Week, in Guatemala, Cuba, Jamaica, Haiti, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Venezuela and Colombia, he has been preparing for the Caribbean Area Leaders' Training Course to be held in Matanzas, Cuba, December 21 to January 5. He will be in Rio de Janeiro for some time before leaving to make his headquarters in Uruguay.

*Philippe Maury* spent several days meeting with leaders of the Studentengemeinde in Berlin before attending the session of the European Council held in Nurnberg, Germany, early in May. Together with Kyaw Than and John Deschner he went to Vienna to meet with the I.U.S. representatives. He will be on vacation during most of July, returning to the office to make final preparations for the meeting of the Federation Officers to be held in Bièvres, France, early in August.

*Leila Giles*, whom we now officially welcome to the W.S.C.F. staff, will begin her work on July 10 by attending the study conference of the British S.C.M. at Swanwick and then visiting Berlin. After the Officers' meeting in Bièvres, she will go to Finland to take part in the Federation Chalet.



<sup>1</sup> See page 84.

*Leila Giles*

## NEWS LETTER

Dear reader :

This issue of the *News Sheet* contains reflections on and descriptions of experiences in Bible study, by several members of the Federation. It is by no means an exhaustive report of what is being done in this field in the national Movements : we have picked out only a few examples of the efforts which are being made to integrate study of the Bible into S.C.M. programs, and to encourage students to become familiar with that book. We have especially asked the writers to describe the problems with which they are confronted and to suggest questions that seem most urgent to them. We very much hope that after reading this *News Sheet* you will not simply file it away, but that you will send us your comments on what it contains. It would be most helpful if, at this stage in the Federation's life, we could have some counsel on how the initiatives which we have taken in our Movements in Bible study, or more generally in biblical education, might be carried further or modified.

As I think back over the nine years of Federation life which I have shared, I am grateful for the time I have been obliged to spend in searching the Scriptures in order to prepare Bible study outlines for conferences, to lead Bible study groups, or to write about the Bible. But throughout these years I have felt the need to explore new avenues in relation both to private Bible study and biblical thinking in general. The 1947 Lundsberg Conference (following the World Conference of Christian Youth at Oslo) was instrumental in renewing interest in Bible study in many S.C.M.s, and brought the Bible to life for many, as witnessed by the enthusiastic letters we received after it. Since then national Movements have described in their reports their work in the field of Bible study and how in their group work they are using the "Lundsberg method". This is all well and good, but the S.C.M. cannot live on warmed-over enthusiasms. The discovery of 1947 may have done its work by now, and the W.S.C.F., without abandoning the fruits of a significant experience, must push forward in fulfilling its responsibility for the biblical education of its members. One of the acute problems is that being tackled by the British S.C.M. — personal daily Bible reading. To what extent are we dealing realistically and constructively with this? Have we anything to say which might help this S.C.M. to improve its efforts, any criticisms or suggestions? Do we think something along these lines could be tried elsewhere, or do we have objections to it? What else would we suggest?

The French S.C.M. and the Indonesian village groups both seem to have been greatly helped by the dramatic use of the Bible. Is there something here into which we should look deeper? What about trying to rewrite a passage in our modern language in order to better understand it? What about the use of the Bible in pastoral care? Do we teach our students to use it otherwise than as just a reference book where they can find answers to knotty doctrinal questions, or as a source of merely spiritual uplift? Do we see that students get enough biblical and theological education to enable them to grow in the Christian faith and to witness to others, or do we leave them at sea, and wonder afterwards why they are inarticulate, unable to give



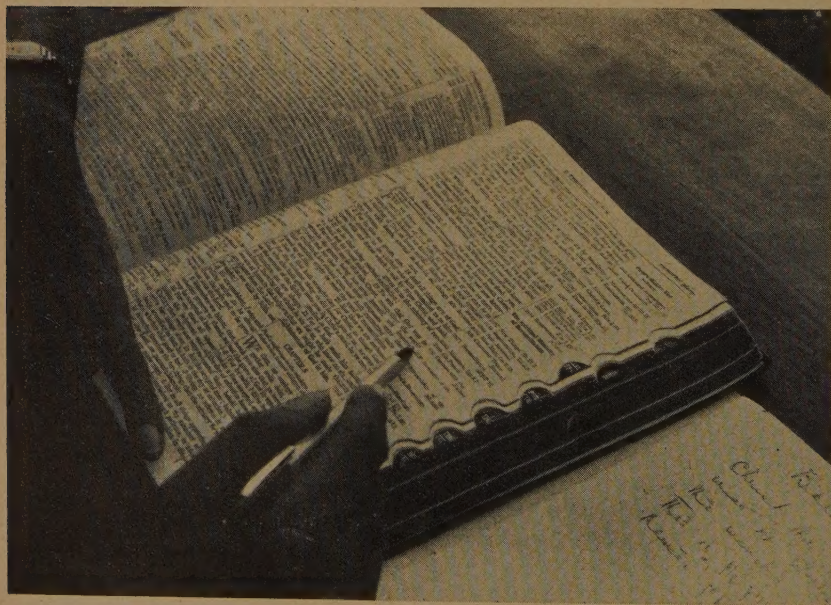
a coherent interpretation of their own lives, and why their witness in the universities is so weak?

In the General Committee at Nasrapur, the Sub-Committee on "Our Task of Theological Education" devoted much time to these questions. Among other suggestions it emphasized the importance of seeing Bible study "in intimate relation to the task of the S.C.M. as a fellowship continually active in Christian witness in the university. The Word of God comes to men only in a living context and demands obedience in the world, for example, in politics, the university, etc. The witness can be carried out both in the Bible study group, when Christians and non-Christians meet together, and in other contexts." I hope you will read the Minutes of the General Committee so you can let us have your comments on other recommendations of ways in which the Federation and Student Christian Movements might fulfil their responsibility for the theological education of their members.

My greatest hope for you as I leave the Federation staff is that you will go forward in this search for a better understanding of the Word of God. From my new home in Canada I shall follow closely developments in Bible study in your Movements and in the Federation. The last nine years have been for me a rich and rewarding experience, and I send to you all my warm thanks for everything you have contributed to make them so.

Sincerely yours,

MARIE-JEANNE DE HALLER.



*Bible study at the World Conference of Christian Youth, Travancore*

# THE BIBLE IN THE BRITISH S.C.M.

JOHN GIBBS  
*Study Secretary*

It is the intention of the Movement that the Bible shall be central to its life. We have recently had cause to examine this claim and to see if the actual life of the Movement fulfils our intention and reflects our conviction that Jesus Christ is King and Lord of Scripture, that by the power of the Holy Spirit the Bible becomes contemporary testimony, and that it is therefore only as we take seriously Holy Scripture that we are able both to hear and respond to the Word of God.

## *Use of the Bible at conferences*

In all conferences arranged by the Movement the Bible figures in two ways, worship and study. The worship is in the hands of the chaplain, of course, but biblical meditations and expositions are common. A fairly concentrated period of Bible study is common to all our conferences, large and small, and for this notes are prepared by a chief Bible group leader. Groups of about ten or twelve are arranged, and usually group leaders are prepared before the conference. I think it is true to say that some of the best and most successful Bible study in the Movement is done in conferences.

For our annual ten-day study conference a special Bible study outline is written, which in turn becomes the special Bible study for the year throughout the Movement. Members of each study group take it in turns to lead, and those who have been appointed leaders for the next day meet in the evening for a training session which lasts one and a half hours. Instruction is given on the mechanics of group leading and Bible study, and the passage for group study the next day is discussed. Thus every student in the conference receives instruction and gains practice in leading Bible study. In Federation circles this is known as the "Lundsberg method", and through it many students get really excited about the Bible for the first time, and this short training period undoubtedly has a great effect throughout the life of the Movement.

Each year we hold a Bible school which is specifically designed to give a more prolonged period of instruction to delegates from the branches, and to train people who will be responsible for Bible study in them. It is not open to theological students. An Old Testament and a New Testament scholar each gives a series of lectures either on a particular theme or a general introduction to the Testaments. In addition there are sessions on the Bible in worship, in private prayer, in the S.C.M., in daily life, as well as study groups on a particular book.

## *Bible study in local branches*

Of the total number of study groups in the Movement branches, well over a third are Bible study groups, about a third are concerned with Christian doctrine, and under a third with the implications of the faith in industry, politics, university, international and missionary affairs. About a third of our study outlines are on the Bible. Most of them contain an introduction on how to use the outline, which emphasizes the need for preparation, gives



instruction on how group study should be attempted, recommends use of a text, and gives a list of books for reference, on both a general introduction to the Bible and the text for study. It suggests that the study should proceed by asking three questions (assuming preparation, of course):

First: What is the writer actually saying; to whom is he saying it, and what would it have meant for reader or hearer; why is this passage (story-incident, etc.) here at all?

Second: What is the importance of this passage in the light of the whole biblical revelation?

Third: What does this passage teach me — what is the Word of God here for me and the world in which I live?

While these three stages are not to be regarded as clear steps to be taken self-consciously with every fresh passage, but rather as a general pattern for study, they do represent certain marks which should be characteristic of a good group. The first means that there will be a real attempt to take seriously the text, which in turn will mean an intelligent use of commentaries and other helps (including the outline itself). The second means that the particular passage being studied will be used as an entry into the whole Bible, and this will necessitate taking seriously cross references. An Old Testament passage will lead into the New, and a New Testament one will be seen in the light of the Old, and the whole will be seen from its centre — Jesus Christ. The third, and by far the most difficult, will mean that study produces certain questions which must be faced. Questions are therefore appended, not to provide topics for discussion, but to witness to the fact that Bible study leads to questions which God asks of us. A warning is given that though these were the questions which were formulated for one person from his study of the passage, they are not necessarily the questions which the group will find are raised for them.

In addition to the outlines and the introduction to Bible study they contain, we have a booklet on *Study Groups and Their Leadership* and another projected on *How to Use the Bible*.

### *Private Bible study*

It is obvious from the above that at any given time two-thirds of those in groups are not studying the Bible, that a number of branches never do Bible study, and that therefore a large number of people never participate in a group or receive help in understanding the Bible. Moreover, since a good many students do only one or two terms of Bible study, it is assumed that what they have done in groups they will continue in their own private study of the Bible. There is reason to believe, however, that this assumption is not justified and that in fact students do not continue to read the Bible and are certainly not equipped to do so.

There is a strong tradition inherited from the past that every S.C.M. member reads his Bible every day, and that by so doing he may expect to hear a word of God which will give him strength to face the day. In fact, the two distinctive (but not only) marks of a Christian student are Bible reading and prayer. There are two immediate difficulties about this:

1. Most students simply do not have the time to do daily Bible study. Maybe they can spend ten minutes a day reading the Bible and making it a

basis for meditation and prayer, but this is not Bible *study*. A number of students participate in schemes for Bible reading, but the daily notes are of a homiletical or devotional character and are not real study.

2. There is no confidence in the simple direct use of the Bible in this age and students are confused about handling it. It may well be that God speaks a word through an isolated passage or verse, but is it the normal way to hear God's Word, and are we not leading people to experience frustration over the Bible in this way? It is the whole biblical revelation which speaks and not isolated extracts. Thus some pattern such as we have outlined above is necessary, and this is generally impossible as a daily routine with only ten minutes in which to do it.

It was in an attempt to face these difficulties that we launched two years ago a Bible reading and study scheme of our own. For six days in the week students are asked to read only a set passage from the Bible. On the seventh day they are expected to put aside an hour, and help is provided for a fairly solid piece of Bible study. The study can be done in groups (a great advantage for members living together), but there are no questions appended. The study concludes with suggestions for further reflection on the passage, leading into prayer and acts of obedience. The scheme is issued in six booklets a year, and in three years most of the Bible will be covered and some books will be read twice.

In many respects this scheme is not ideal, for example, reading a Gospel in one term and only studying eight passages from it (though the passages are carefully chosen so that these studies will give a fairly clear understanding of the book as a whole). But the question is not whether it is the best, but whether it is the best in the situation it is designed to meet.

Senior people think that we are on to something important, but it has not been accepted as widely as we had at first hoped. It would be foolish, however, to think that habits of Bible reading are formed overnight, and no doubt we should allow a longer time before we make a real judgment. On the other hand, in view of the rapidly changing character of student personnel, the failure of the scheme to commend itself fairly quickly will be serious.

More than that, however, I think its greatest weakness is that it does not give adequate help in showing students how to use the Bible. They do not like being left high and dry with Bible *reading* alone on six days, and in the absence of appended questions and *group* study they never really succeed in answering satisfactorily the last question — what does this mean for me and the world in which I live? The conclusion would appear to be that we are not yet meeting the needs of students, and that perhaps a different kind of study must be attempted, one which will not be just a popularizing of historical and theological scholarship, but will assume it, build upon it, and ask what is the meaning of this passage for the present day. We sincerely hope we shall not have to abandon the scheme before we have at least experimented with it.

This then is an account of how in our stumbling way we are endeavouring to gather our Movement around the Word of God. It would be good to know what other Movements in the Federation are doing so we may help and correct each other.



# EXPERIMENTS IN BIBLE STUDY IN THE FRENCH S.C.M.

MAX-ALAIN CHEVALLIER

Suzanne de Diétrich was a Secretary of the French S.C.M. before she became such a well-known personality in the ecumenical movement. And it was within the *Fédé* that this woman, who was by profession an engineer — something rare enough at that time — devoted herself to Bible study. It was for small groups of students that she built up little by little her biblical commentaries and questionnaires. It is then evident that Bible study was very early given an honoured place in the life of our Movement. The theological renewal of the 'thirties was firmly upheld and guided by a concern for faithfulness to the Scriptures, and the enthusiasm of a whole generation for Bible study quickly made itself felt in the life of the churches, and has not ceased to bear fruit.

Nevertheless, during the last few years — it seems to have begun during the war — we have experienced in our student groups a crisis in the field of Bible study: students apparently have the idea that it is something which is always difficult and often dull. What is the reason for this? It is difficult to say precisely. No doubt it is partly due to the fact that the instruction and preaching of the local pastors is much more biblical now than in the past, but in a way which is a little too scholastic and which too often takes the form of abstract doctrinal expositions — more or less successful. Among the students there is a vague feeling that the Bible can be really understood only by specialists, that only they can find it passionately interesting, and that the results of their research do not have much relationship to every-day life. Obviously this attitude is serious. Note well that only in exceptional cases does it result in a forsaking of the biblical truth; the students continue to come to services of worship and to read their Bibles, neither more nor less than before. But it is serious when they make a distinction between the biblical truth which is the exclusive possession of scholars, and the crumbs which they themselves can pick up, but which are not sufficient to sustain their daily life in the midst of the world.

Consequently we asked ourselves what we could do to restore to Bible study the power which it had in the years before the war. We came to the same conclusion as those in other countries: let us entrust the Bible study in our groups to scholars who are sufficiently concerned about people to find a way to explain the Scriptures in the context of the questions which are occupying the minds of the students. We are continuing to do this, but we believe that the method of resolving the question "from above" is not enough and might even be dangerous: students become accustomed to being "minors" in Christian truth and in the Church. The real solution is to make it possible for they themselves to read the Bible so that it becomes the Word of God for their lives without the necessity for scholars to act as intermediaries. The few experiments which I am going to describe aim to do this.



## The "dramatic" understanding

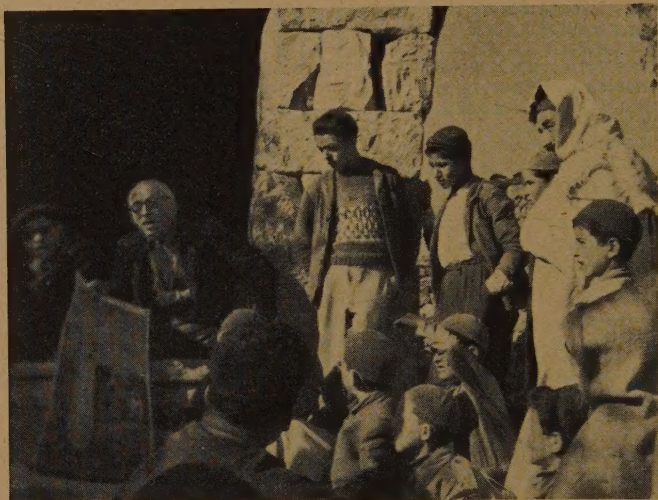
The title is pretentious, but the thing itself is simple. We know that the whole Bible is made up of stories of the work of God. He intervenes in the life of a man or a people, and it is always with authority that He summons, calls in question, liberates or condemns. We have unfortunately made of His Word something intellectual, forgetting that it is always cutting as the sword, telling as the hammer which strikes and shatters the rock. We have forgotten that the intervention of God in the life of a man or a people is always "dramatic". As in all great dramas, and even more than there, it is a question of life and death, of liberty and slavery, of the joy and the suffering of human beings of flesh and blood whose destiny is at stake. The revelations made or the questions posed in the Bible are not intellectual, but living, existential. This is what we must rediscover — or not lose — in Bible study.

So we proposed that every passage be considered as a fragment of a drama, and that it be studied in the same way as we have learned to study Aeschylus, Shakespeare or Racine. For French students this implies a very specific method, for they have learned in secondary school to follow certain rules: to locate the text in its context — in the unfolding of the dramatic action, to describe the characters and to pick out the themes of their dialogue, the crux of their discussions, and so forth. But the methods chosen are of secondary importance: what is essential is to determine clearly what is decisive in the interchange between God and man, assuming that there is *always*, in every biblical text, a dramatic encounter between them.

Obviously all passages are not dramatic in the same way. It is easy to see the dramatic in the stories of Genesis or the pronouncements of the prophets, the Gospel stories or certain sections of the Epistles which are exhortations. But we are convinced that we should also regard the poetic books of the Old Testament, and even those parts of the Epistles which are most concerned with doctrine, as encounters "for life or death" between God and man. For revealed truth is never a matter of passive knowledge, but a question of salvation or damnation, of obedience or revolt. The parables of Jesus, with the point which he gives to them, are the best examples of this kind of teaching which always hits the mark.

This method of dramatic understanding of the Bible seems to us to offer, among other advantages, that of leading easily to a personal application, while maintaining at the same time due respect for the text. We know for a fact that there is very often a contradiction in our Bible study between a respect for the historical and an effort to apply the text to today. Too often we take liberties with the Scriptures when we "transpose" them to make them relevant to our situation. While trying to understand from the inside the "drama" of a psalmist or that in which Paul and his Roman readers are engaged with God, we will discern the questions which were decisive for them and which in all probability are just as crucial for us. We will recognize very quickly that the significant questions of the Word of God are not conditioned by psychology or history, even though they are obviously put in a specific psychological and historical context.

I should point out that it is possible in exceptional cases to contribute to the Bible study by acting out certain passages. I am not speaking of



*"The revelations made or the questions posed in the Bible are not intellectual, but living, existential."*

*The French S.C.M. rediscovered this truth two years ago when it organized a camp in the mountains of North Africa, where the students accompanied missionaries on their travels. Here a student of English sits beside a missionary who is preaching the Gospel to Mohammedans.*

"biblical plays" prepared by specialists, but of improvisations such as those of the *Comedia dell'arte*. Here is how the students in one of our camps studied, then acted out, the story of Naboth's vineyard (I Kings 21). We began with a general Bible study in which we extracted the essential points of the story, drew up on the basis of this a first outline of the play, and then by common agreement assigned the roles to those who seemed best suited to fill them. And immediately : on stage for act one ! Each character, helped if necessary by the other actors and the spectators, made up his part as he went along. In no case were episodes added to the story ; we merely reproduced it, emphasizing the important points. Obviously a good director is a great help. When we finished this first attempt, we repeated certain scenes again and again in an effort to draw out more clearly their meaning and significance, and we presented the final result before an audience of farmers, who were either Catholics or unbelievers. We are not sure what the audience got from the performance, but those who participated in its preparation did one of the best Bible studies of their lives.



### *Preparing a study outline for the use of others*

Those who have had to prepare for others a plan for Bible study know both how difficult it is and also how rewarding. We wanted all students to have the benefit of this enriching experience, making the work less difficult in order not to discourage them.

Orally or in writing, according to the circumstances, someone competent in Bible study gives some preliminary instruction in order to clear away the greatest "technical" obstacles to an understanding of the passage: textual difficulties, defects in the translation, historical details, presuppositions of the author, and so forth. The students then divide up into small groups of five or six with the following three purposes:

- to locate the passage in its context; to clarify those points which present some difficulty; to draw up a detailed study outline, picking out carefully the essential points; to find if possible a title.

- to draw up a questionnaire to guide the reader in his understanding of the passage.

- to draw up a second questionnaire which puts before the reader the personal questions posed by the passage; to foresee, if possible, the replies.

Finally everyone comes together again to study the results of the group work.

The advantages of this method are easily seen. We have studied in this way part of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The posing of questions related to the text is not only a means of making the study more "active", but corresponds to and brings out in an excellent and clear way the profound nature of the Bible as a summons, a calling in question by God. And what does it matter if these questions sometimes remain unanswered for those who formulate them? Bible study done *ex cathedra* is too often complete, satisfying, closed. Moreover, when the groups come together, they question and answer each other. And where the question marks are too big, they consult the experts.

This method can be combined very advantageously with what we have called the "dramatic" understanding of the Bible.

### *Drawing up a commentary in the form of a modern paraphrase, and a prayer based on the text*

Certain biblical passages, for example, from the prophets or the Epistles, lend themselves especially well to commentaries in the form of paraphrase. To make a good paraphrase is not as easy as one might think; it requires an effort to express oneself in modern terms, eliminating all pious phrases. When small groups of students make a paraphrase of a few verses and then compare the results, they have an opportunity to do serious Bible study. As an example, here is a paraphrase of Psalm 72, verses 8 to 10, made by some students during our last national conference:

8. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth.

8. The God of Jesus Christ will reign over all creatures, in the heaven and on the earth, and especially over the thoughts and acts of men.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>9. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him ; and his enemies shall lick the dust.</p> <p>10. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents : the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts.</p> | <p>9. He has the power to command obedience in the whole universe, but the full manifestation of this authority is still the object of the Christian hope.</p> <p>10. The powers of the East will bow low before him, those of the West will be humbled.</p> |
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A similar project is to write a prayer as faithful as possible to the text being studied, in other words, to transform the text into a prayer. Here is an example of a prayer written by some students :

Psalm 72, verse 8

He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth.

Prayer

O God, may thy Kingdom come, may thy glory and thy power soon be made manifest before all nations, as it was made manifest in the victory of Jesus Christ over death.

In this example the work was simplified by the fact that the prayer was based on a Psalm which was already similar to a prayer. But it is possible to set the same task for very different texts.

This attempt to write a prayer based on a biblical passage obviously serves a double purpose : it prevents the study of the text from becoming a purely intellectual exercise, giving it rather the character of a dialogue with God, and it also helps students to become accustomed to praying according to the Scriptures.

\* \* \*

Such are our present efforts to renew Bible study in our groups, our camps and our conferences. They certainly do not replace the traditional type of Bible study with its famous questionnaires, or Bible study done from time to time *ex cathedra*. But they do aim to overcome the disadvantages of these other methods. These experiments have not been thoroughly tested. They are only recent efforts which have had encouraging results for some students — we are still only at the ABC stage.

There can be no revival of Bible study which is not accompanied by a parallel renewal in the reading of and meditation on the Bible in the context of worship. That is why we are carrying on at the same time research into ways of reading the Bible in private or community worship. We are working on it in our camps and our publications, and seem to have learned a little. But we are still feeling our way.

We would be most grateful to know if other national Movements are asking themselves the same questions as we are, if they are discovering new paths, and how they would evaluate the efforts we have made.

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# BIBLE STUDY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

KYAW THAN

*W.S.C.F. Associate General Secretary*

The expression "Bible study" will surely conjure up a variety of pictures in the minds of people in touch with students in Southeast Asia. To some leaders of the Roman tradition in the Philippine Islands, it may suggest a group of young people inordinately and improperly handling the Scriptures, studying with no guidance from an approved "churchman". To others it may imply the activity of a small clique of people who are usually marked by "pietism". To most people the phrase "Bible study group" means a body of people gathered together to study passages from the Scriptures or a particular book of the Bible. But in Indonesia, when I went to join what I had been told was a student "Bible study group", I soon discovered that the term was used to describe a study circle which was discussing a pamphlet on *Christianity and Communism*. It was led by the author himself, an able Christian professor. The secretary, who took very seriously her responsibility for bringing the group together regularly, was, I found to my surprise and delight, an earnest non-Christian student. In more than one group in these countries of Southeast Asia I have come across non-Christian members who regularly attend the meetings of the S.C.M. and participate in its activities.

What then is a Bible study group? Obviously in Southeast Asia it is not simply a group of students, members of the Church, gathered together to study passages from or a selected book of the Bible. When a group is called a "Bible study group", should it use a book or passages from the Bible as its study material? Could some current political, social or intellectual subject be chosen, with light being sought by members of the group as they relate the topic to their understanding of the Bible and what it has to teach? Could such a group be called a Bible study group in the usual sense of the term? What type of leadership should it have? A clergyman? A trained layman? Or an ordinary student who has done some special preparation? What should be the composition of a Bible study group? How can we welcome the participation of non-Christian students without affecting the basic nature and intention of the group to honestly feel after the truth in studying the Word of God?

There have been in Southeast Asia Bible study *classes* as distinguished from Bible study groups. I remember once attending a Bible study institute, systematically organized under the leadership of an able Asian lecturer and theologian, to which about one hundred persons came regularly. At one time, when I was staying for a prolonged period in Singapore, I joined a weekly Bible study group on the campus. I remember going one day to find no-one there except the leader and the student secretary, because of the unexpected heavy rains which had flooded some of the approaches to the campus. Our usual meeting place, a spot on the lawn, was thoroughly drenched. At the Far Eastern University, an institution of about 25,000 students,

who attend classes in relays, I once entered a classroom which was not being used at that time for lectures or tutorials, to find a small group of students in a corner preparing to sing a hymn, pray and read passages from the Bible, as other students came and went in the room.

Such is the variety in size, environment, character, background and composition of so-called "Bible study groups" among students in Southeast Asia. Some have the benefit of the pastoral care and leadership of chaplains, youth secretaries or professors. Some groups just go on with the dogged tenacity of students with "evangelical" piety.

When the Southeast Asian S.C.M. study series was published, at least four pamphlets were intended to help students in the study of the Scriptures. There have also been newer ventures from other quarters. While visiting one of the Student Christian Movements, I happened to pick up a publication which looked very much like *Picture Post* or *Life* or one of the other popular illustrated magazines. I was surprised and pleased to discover that it was the Gospel according to St. Matthew, published by some Roman Catholic organization. No-one can deny the vision, adaptability and evangelical fervour of such a group, which attempts to communicate the Good News through such an unorthodox technique appealing to the general laity.

The third World Conference of Christian Youth, held in an Asian setting and with two-thirds of its participants Asian, made clear the need for young people in Asia to have more knowledge of the content of the Gospel and of basic Christian teachings. Any effort or technique which will assist in conveying the knowledge of the truth of the Bible to the minds of Asian youth will be a basic and significant contribution in the service of Asia today. The necessity for this becomes more real when we take into consideration the weakness of the background in biblical education of the student in Southeast Asia. The present stage in European history is often referred to as the "post-Christian era". There was a period during which Europe's code of ethics and terms of reference were related to Christian values. Southeast Asia has known no such period. The task in Europe may be to revitalize the Christian bases of culture and civilization, but in Southeast Asia it is the propagation of basic Christian knowledge and the laying of the foundations of faith that continue to be the need. This implies that there must be a different emphasis in the S.C.M. program in this part of the world, if the S.C.M. leaders are seriously concerned about the pastoral care of its members. Even the requirements for straightforward Bible study are different. As an Asian S.C.M. leader once said, "The pooling of ignorance will not necessarily produce wisdom." The condition has been made worse by the years of the second world war during which our present student generation grew up without the benefits of an ordered congregational life, Sunday schools or organized religious education courses. The great need in Asia today is not so much a "rediscovery of the Bible" as the "introduction of the Bible". It is not so much a case of importing learned publications from abroad, as of helping and promoting the local publication of relevant literature.

In maintaining this Christian nurture on the campus, the service rendered by some eminent scholars and young professors, both indigenous and from overseas, people who came out of a Student Christian Movement background, by "Y" secretaries and by student workers from abroad, has been significant.



# BOOKS YOU SHOULD READ

MARIE-JEANNE DE HALLER

*Rediscovering the Bible*, by Bernhard Anderson. Association Press, New York. This excellent book, which was written in cooperation with students, is highly recommended. It deals in an easy-to-read and understandable way with specific problems challenging the faith of many students today, and, in the author's own words, shows how "the Bible presents a historical pageant, whose theme is the triumphant working out of God's purpose in spite of all attempts to oppose it".

*The Unfolding Drama of the Bible*, by Bernhard Anderson. Association Press, New York. In eight studies which introduce the Bible as a whole, the author deals with the drama which is the story of the consequences of man's separation from God, from his fellow men, and within himself, and God's action to overcome this separation as seen in the thousand-year span of history the Bible covers. Each study is based on specific passages from the Bible and includes "questions to think about". This, together with the following, are recommended for use in student Bible study groups.

*Discovering the Bible*, by Suzanne de Diétrich. Available from the World Council of Churches' Youth Department, Geneva, or the World Council of Christian Education and Sunday School Association, New York. This small book outlines the main theme running through the Bible — the history of salvation. It contains suggestions on how to run a Bible study group, and sample study outlines with questions for discussion on various sections of the Old and New Testament.

*The Bible Today*, by C. H. Dodd. Macmillan, New York. An excellent introduction to the whole Bible.

*A Theological Word Book of the Bible*, by Alan Richardson. S.C.M. Press, London. This is an indispensable aid to the study of the Bible. It deals in a clear and scholarly way with all the words in the Bible which are of special importance for biblical theology.

*Letters to Young Churches*, by J. B. Phillips. Geoffrey Bles, London. The Epistles in modern, easy-to-understand language.

*Le peuple de Dieu*, by Bruno Balscheit. Bonne Presse, Paris, et Sociétés des Ecoles du Dimanche de France, Paris. A description of each book of the Old Testament, giving its history, its message, and its place in the Bible.

*Le renouveau biblique*, by Suzanne de Diétrich. Delachaux et Niestlé, Neuchâtel and Paris. This book describes the use of the Bible through the ages and in the different churches. It makes suggestions on how to lead Bible study, and contains Bible study outlines for use with different types of groups, and with different approaches to the Bible — studies on particular themes, on individual books, and on various kinds of passages. Also available in Germany as *Die Wiederentdeckung der Bibel*, published by Gotthelf-Verlag, Zurich.

The S.C.M. of Great Britain and the member Movements of the U.S.C.C. in the United States have produced Bible study outlines which are suitable for use in student groups, and which may be secured from their offices.

# BIBLE STUDIES ON PSALMS

MARIE-JEANNE DE HALLER

These two study outlines on Psalms 73 and 118 form part of a series, which also included studies on Psalms 2 and 139. These four were chosen to illustrate the great variety of the Psalms.

The Psalter is a collection of hymns and prayers of the people of God. Its real value is not literary — for example, as a collection of beautiful poems. The Christian Church has recognized in it the precious witness rendered by the community of believers to the living God revealed to them in His creation and in the whole history of His people. He is Israel's Good Shepherd who guides and preserves His own, who has revealed to them His will in His law, and assured them of His presence in the temple.

The Psalms, in their manifold variety, are the inspired response of the believer to God's revelation of Himself. Some are directly addressed to God as petition or thanksgiving or praise; some are the communings of the soul with God, expressing its faith, its hope, its love, its needs, its fears, its aspirations, its joys, its triumphs; some celebrate the "marvellous works" of God in nature and in history; some reflect upon the perplexing problems of life and their relation to the divine government of the world. But God is the centre around which they all revolve.

It is not surprising that the Church's tradition has given such a prominent place in the liturgy to the Psalms. In them is expressed the drama of the relationship between God, man and the world, which was finally achieved in Jesus Christ. It is because He, Jesus Christ, will take upon Himself all the sins of His people that the psalmist can count so confidently on God's forgiveness. In Him who alone is just will righteousness some day be victorious; through His suffering on the Cross God will punish all evil; in Him all hopes and joys of the psalmist have their sure foundation.

## Psalm 73

*I have put my trust in the Lord God*

This Psalm is a confession which has come out of the struggle of a believer who is horrified by the sight of triumphant evil. There is the baffling fact of monstrous evil in the world. It is blasphemous to attempt to believe that one glorifies God by disguising it by facile explanations. We can be thankful that the biblical writers honestly recognize and denounce this evil and confess that they are confused by it.

*Verses 1-3:* Do we ever hear the well-known verse, "All things work together for good to them that love God" (Romans 8 : 28), without a mental reservation? Are we as honest as the psalmist *vis-à-vis* God?

*Verses 4-12 (especially 10-11):* What is the attitude of the wicked *vis-à-vis* God? Where do we find such people?



*Verses 15-28* : What prevents the psalmist from joining the chorus of protest ? Does it occur to us to enter the sanctuary at such times ? (verse 17). What difference does it make ?

*Verses 24-28* : In what sense are these phrases true ? Can they be true for us ?

*Whole Psalm* : Do we have the same doubts and the same faith as the psalmist, or do we have a passive, weary, almost hopeless attitude towards evil ? What effect does our attitude have upon the life of the Church and upon our witness in the world ?

## Psalm 118

### *O give thanks unto the Lord*

This Psalm is a liturgical hymn of gratitude whose origin dates probably from the return from the exile. Verses 1-18 were probably sung by the procession going to the temple ; verses 19-29 form a series of responses, the first between the leader of the choir and the doorkeepers of the temple, and succeeding ones between members of the choir after their entry into the temple. The whole Psalm is trying to express the gratitude of the people for their delivery, and was used liturgically in later years to remind Israel of the continuing, saving presence of God.

1. Look for the themes of praise to the Lord which recur throughout the Psalm.

2. What temptations has Israel had in times of adversity ? (See verses 6-9.) Do we have similar temptations today ? What are they ?

3. Does the love of God preserve us from all suffering ? Why does suffering so often lead to revolt and bitterness ? (Cf. verse 5.)

4. What meaning did the people of Israel find in their deliverance, and how do they think they ought to use it ? (See verses 15-21.) Is this also a reality for us and for the Church today ?

5. The figure of the cornerstone occurs frequently in the Bible. What is its significance in the history of salvation ? How could Jesus apply it to Himself ? (Cf. Matthew 21 : 24, Mark 10 : 11, Luke 20 : 17, Acts 4 : 2, I Peter 2 : 7, Ephesians 2 : 20-22.) In what other circumstances has this Psalm been quoted ? (Cf. Matthew 21 : 1-11, Mark 11 : 1-11.) Why ?

6. What is the full significance of this Psalm for the Church today ? Can we pray it ourselves in faith ? If not, is it because we do not know what deliverance is ? From what do we need to be delivered ?

7. What does it teach us about the nature of a living faith in its relation to praise ?

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# COLLEGE STUDENTS AND BIBLE STUDY IN THE UNITED STATES

EDWARD L. NESTINGEN

*Program Secretary, National Student Y.M.C.A.*

During the past ten years, there has been a very considerably increased emphasis upon Bible study in the various Student Christian Movements in the United States. This has been most evident in the national conferences, national assemblies, and the many regional intercollegiate conferences which are held each year. As yet, however, the level of Bible study being done on college campuses remains low.

This article will (1) indicate some of the factors which influence the extent and type of Bible study being done by college Christian groups; (2) relate what national organizations are doing to stimulate more adequate Bible study<sup>1</sup>, and (3) tell of some of the local and intercollegiate experiences.

## *Conditioning factors and influences*

In the depression years of the 1930's and the war years, Bible study was at a low ebb. Campuses were strongly influenced by scientific positivism, a primary concern for vocational preparation, and a supreme confidence that the problems of the individual and of society could be solved by intelligence and willingness. The biblical understanding of the tragic way in which man has separated himself from God and, consequently, from his fellow men, was largely unknown. Where known, it seemed irrelevant.

During the earlier years of the twentieth century, Bible study had had a much more prominent place in campus Christian work, largely under the inspiration of Harry Emerson Fosdick and Bruce Curry. Dr. Fosdick's books, *The Meaning of Prayer*, *The Meaning of Faith* and *The Meaning of Service*, were widely used. Under the auspices of the Y.M.C.A., he and others travelled extensively, introducing these basic concepts of the Bible to large numbers of college students. Special study guides were developed. Many state and area Y.M.C.A. organizations had Bible study secretaries. Thousands of students met regularly in hundreds of carefully organized "morning watch" groups for Bible reading and prayer. Dr. Curry was active during the 'twenties. He prepared guides which had a nation-wide use, and worked intensively with faculty and staff groups and with large numbers of students. His was primarily a "life problem" approach, showing how the Bible helps one meet adequately the many personal and social problems confronting students. All of this met with a considerable popular response.

Three factors resulted in a greatly decreased emphasis upon the Bible in college Christian work during the immediate past: (1) the tendency in American Protestantism to make Christianity moralistic and to emphasize the ethical teachings of the Bible in general and the Gospels in specific. The

<sup>1</sup> This article does not deal with the fundamentalist Bible study programs such as those sponsored by the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship. These are widespread in the United States.



"drama of salvation" became increasingly unknown, especially to younger Christians. Consequently the perspective of the Bible as a whole was lost, and the central affirmations of God's saving acts in human history were not understood. Even where "facts" about the Bible were still known, they no longer had a coherent meaning.

(2) For those to whom the "good news" of salvation was proclaimed, its power and meaningfulness were often not known existentially. A basic optimism about the future and a faith in the power of moral man when guided by his intelligence and common sense was one reason for this. Another was the widespread and easy acceptance of America as a Christian nation with Christian (that is, democratic) institutions.

(3) The increasing "mass production" in American higher education, with an accompanying de-personalizing of the educational experience. The difficulties which this creates are often not at first apparent. For large numbers of students, the concept of study has tended to become mechanical, with more of an emphasis upon memorization than upon an encounter with the living spirit communicated through the written word. Consequently, conversation, sharing and the deeper dimensions of personal encounter tend to remain undeveloped. The average student is not stimulated to look inward. The search for knowledge is externalized and it becomes difficult to perceive the nature of the Bible as a record of personal encounter.

Most of the student Christian groups, whether Y.M.C.A., Y.W.C.A. or denominationally sponsored, have tended to be organized around activities. Many carry on excellent campus-wide programs of education and action on major social and ethical problems, showing a deep concern for race discrimination, world tensions, academic freedom and civil liberties. Service programs (for example, freshman orientation, students from abroad, community welfare) are also important.

At the same time, many of the country's outstanding Christian leaders travel widely among colleges under the auspices of college Christian groups. They are bringing with renewed vigour the biblical challenge upon impersonalized education, and the even more pervasive de-personalizing tendencies of the twentieth century technological culture. As yet, however, the large majority of student groups are not relating these penetrating challenges to the inner life of the Christian fellowship and to the discipline of serious group study. The above-mentioned factors are all formidable barriers to overcome.

Nonetheless, there is a significant and encouraging discontent with the relatively superficial programs of the average college Christian group. This is being made manifest in many ways. A renewed emphasis upon Bible study is one marked indication of this.

### *Bible study as a national emphasis*

During the past ten years, every national Student Christian Movement in the United States has placed a high priority upon Bible study. Each has strongly stated this concern in its objectives and in its conferences.

The Presbyterians U.S.A. state as the first of their six national program objectives: "To know the Bible: what it is, why it is, and how to discover



*Bible study group at New England S. C. M. conference at O-At-Ka.*

God's word speaking through it, guiding faith and life." This can be considered as representative of a general concern of all groups.

The National Lutheran Council has done more than any other national group in preparing guides for student Bible groups. Approximately fifteen brief guides have been prepared to date on various books of the Bible. These have been widely used by other student Christian groups, as well as being a central emphasis in Lutheran student work.

However, many students are not ready for the study of individual books of the Bible. A very high proportion, even of students of Christian background and training, have so little comprehension of the over-all perspective of the Bible that they find it difficult or even meaningless to try to approach the Bible through a particular book. The National Student Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A. have therefore begun the development of a series of study guides which seek to portray the central theme of the Bible. The first in this series is a sixty-page study guide written by Dr. Bernhard W. Anderson entitled *The Unfolding Drama of the Bible*. It presents the Bible in terms of three "mighty acts" of God in history, each seeking to overcome the fatal separation of man from God. This guide is meeting with a widespread enthusiastic response.

Two regional Student Christian Movements (New England and Middle Atlantic) have recently held Bible study consultations, which drew together outstanding Bible scholars and student leaders. They produced realistic assessments of the ideological and organizational problems on the campus, and outlined steps for bringing students into a confrontation with the Bible. Both sharply stated the conviction that Bible study must be at the heart of the whole purpose and task of the S.C.M. One paragraph from the New England consultation shows the scope of the challenge: "The Bible meets a devotional need and an ideological need; and needs that grow out of our



culture. We must consider various methods of confronting students with the Bible. In some groups we will tackle problems first; in another it will be in terms of someone's witness. We may bring individuals to the point of self exposure to the Bible. An empirical approach here gives the Bible a chance to validate itself. In dealing with sceptics we do not always hand them a Bible. Perhaps for them we need to prepare a dialogue that will take seriously the case against the Bible for the positivist student."

Both of these consultations sought for ways to find and train more Bible study leadership, student, faculty and professional staff. At present, this is one of the major needs throughout the country. In these and other regions, steps are being taken to hold leadership retreats.

### *Intercollegiate and local experiences*

The most spectacular Bible study experience during recent years was the eight-week program at Bucknell University (Pennsylvania) last fall. As a result of very careful planning, three hundred students were enrolled in groups of fifteen persons each. *The Unfolding Drama of the Bible* was used as the study guide. Its author inaugurated the study program with a series of chapel addresses. Despite the formidable conflicts of curricular requirements and the usual full program of extra-curricular activities, most of these groups maintained their number throughout the eight weeks. Some of them continued throughout the year, pursuing one or another of the concerns raised by the study of Dr. Anderson's book. A very important ingredient in the success of this program was the voluntary training in which the group leaders engaged during the summer preceding the study program.

Increasing numbers of colleges now have regular study groups.

Bible study retreats on an intercollegiate basis, either by states or regions, are a very important way of introducing students, many of them for the first time, to the Bible study experience. In New England, a New Year's week-end group met for three days to study Luke. Another was held later on Galatians. In California and the Middle Atlantic region several Bible study retreats have been held. Increasingly Bible study is becoming a major experience at the annual conferences held each year by the nine regions of the student Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A. Every indication is that this emphasis will increase during the years ahead.

The same trend is true of the various national assemblies and council meetings. This summer, the United Student Fellowship (Congregational Christian and Evangelical and Reformed) will hold its National Assembly and the three days of the Assembly will be devoted entirely to Bible study.

Every indication is, as Hiel Bollinger said in a letter on this subject, that "there is a very decided trend to more Bible study". He gives a great deal of credit for this new impetus to the W.S.C.F. and its various conferences. Certainly the W.S.C.F. conference on the Bible held in Kalamazoo, Michigan, in 1951 had a wide influence throughout the country. Students and staff are still enthusiastic about the stimulation of Marie-Jeanne de Haller's campus visits before and after the conference.

It seems safe to predict that the next few years will produce much in the way of new insights about the task of the American Student Christian Movements in light of the biblical perspective.

# “THE LIVING GOD SPEAKS TO US THROUGH THE BIBLE”

*From a letter of Hans Ruedi Weber, missionary in Indonesia*

Yesterday we brought to an end our five-day Bible study course, during which forty-three men and women, boys and girls from the villages in the area studied with a zeal that would hardly be equalled in Europe. For the first time in our work a group of illiterates took part in the course, and these older men, who rule everything in the life of the village, studied with perhaps even greater enthusiasm than the educated, that is, than those who have been to public school for three years and so know how to read. During these five days we made a trip through the whole Bible and discussed the most important problems of the congregations: what is a Christian congregation? what is a Christian service of worship? what is pastoral care? how should we read the Bible? We also cast our eyes beyond the small world of the village and congregation, and as we learned about the burning issues in the present world situation, we saw that the vision of a Christian reaches to the end of the world and to all time.

A happy community life developed during the course. We learned that every Christian is a witness to Jesus Christ, and on the final day we began our study with a service of testimony.

In the evening we had a social time to which we invited the whole village community, including the Chinese merchant who is not a Christian. We had prepared four short biblical plays. We transformed the pulpit into the temple of Jerusalem, with gates made of coconut palm leaves, and acted out Psalm 100 as a dialogue between the priest and the levite, with choruses of men and women participating. Then we acted out the parables of Luke 10: 30-37, Matthew 18: 23-35, and Mark 4: 3-8, first as charades, so the whole congregation could guess what we were representing, and then with the biblical words, so they both saw and heard the parables. This type of Bible teaching, at the same time visible and audible, has proved to be a very valuable and effective method of evangelism here. We also included in the evening's program three rounds which we had learned during the course, and the Sanctus in four parts from the Russian Orthodox liturgy. During the intermissions there were selections by the village bamboo orchestra conducted with fire by a young elder of the church.

Now a few words about the actual Bible study. The church authorities had given me complete freedom in conducting the courses. Unfortunately I had had neither the time nor the opportunity to experiment and discover good Indonesian ways and methods, so driven by necessity I tried the Bible study method which is used in the S.C.M. and which I had learned from Suzanne de Diétrich at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey. To my amazement it worked superbly here, under completely different circumstances and with people who had had at the most three years of education. I have led such courses in each of the seven church areas, usually after I had spent a week



travelling in the region becoming acquainted with the people and the general situation.

The daily program of the courses, which naturally has to be adapted to the particular circumstances, is made up of Bible study in the morning from 7:30 to 12:00, with a half hour of singing; discussions in the afternoon on the congregation, and in the evening programs which aim to broaden the horizons of the participants.

To introduce the course I say a few words about the place and significance of the Bible in personal life and in the life of the congregation. On the first evening we give a bird's-eye view of the Bible, taking the creation as the starting point, the Kingdom of God as the end, and Christ as the centre which governs everything, the story of the fall and the covenant of God with Israel, the time of the Church between Christ and the manifestation of the Kingdom, and finally, the end and the second coming. All this I draw on the blackboard during our discussion (because many participants in the courses have so little education I work here much more with pictures and drawings than with abstract phrases). On the following four days we study in detail Genesis 3 : 1-19, Genesis 12 : 1-3, Luke 2 : 8-14 and Acts 1 : 6-11.

We begin each day with morning worship in which the passage to be studied is read. Then I give an introduction in which I summarize the biblical message of the previous day and relate it to the passage for that day, again illustrating it on the blackboard. Then the participants divide into groups of about ten in order to study the passage carefully for an hour and a half, with the help of six to ten questions. The day before I help the leaders to prepare for the study. The significance of such group work here cannot be overestimated. These groups form the core of the community which develops during the course. They provide an opportunity for everyone to work at the passage himself, and moreover, the study can be done in the native language, which is a great help for the older people. We also have a group for the illiterates, where the same text is studied with the same questions in a way they can understand, and so they can participate fully in the course. Then we sing for a while before coming together to discuss the questions on the passage, and at the end I sum up the whole study. Each member receives mimeographed copies of the questions discussed with a short answer to each, and a summary of the Bible study of the day. For emphasis we often begin the afternoon by reading together this summary. The use of the mimeographed material makes it unnecessary for the participants to take notes, and gives them a record of the study done which they can use with members of their congregations who were unable to take part in the course. I use two afternoons to give some help on how to read and understand the Bible without the help of commentaries or other literature.

In addition to these regional Bible courses I have led two or three central courses. For example, I was asked by the church authorities to give a theological course for pastors, evangelists and the lay leaders who help the pastors. In the five and one-half days we dealt with the congregation, its task and its worship, preaching, baptism, the Lord's supper, and the Christian hope. With the exception of one day, during which we prepared a sermon together, we worked in the following way. In the mornings we studied in groups the biblical foundation of the theme for the day. In the afternoons we compared

this biblical message with its reality and practice in the congregations, and discussed what changes should be made and how they could be brought about. During the evenings we made a survey of the history of the Church. I had written and mimeographed in advance all the Bible studies (questions, answers and summary), a few practical suggestions, and a summary of the church history. All participants received this material at the end of the course, after they themselves had worked at the questions, so they would have it as a help to guide them in their church work.

Such central courses in the towns are naturally on a different level and have a different spirit and orientation than those in the village. Whereas I could compare the former with similar ones in Europe, those in the villages are a mixture of camp, retreat, course and everything else ! The simplicity and wholeness of the village people, the way in which they are bound to nature, and their realism, mark the Bible courses. In many ways the journey from here to the Bible is much shorter than that from a more sophisticated society. The authentic biblical questions about the destiny of man and the world, the relationships between God and man and between man and his fellows, are not less existential here than anywhere else. Such an Indonesian village community is far from a lost paradise. Genesis 3 is quite relevant here, and such things as angels, miracles, textual criticism, and so forth, which are no problem in the Bible itself, do not "yet" constitute a problem here either, and we can devote our time and attention to a study of the real and essential biblical questions. This may account for the fact that these Bible courses make such an impression on those who take part in them, and not least of all on me. Among theologians and other church workers it is often said that it is not *our* work we do but God's, who works through His Word (we are called ministers of the Word). That this is no pious phrase but a reality has never been so clear to me as in recent months during the Bible courses. No sensational miracles took place and they did not produce any terrific revivals, but I have, together with two to three hundred men and women, experienced again the truth that the living God speaks to us through the Bible, and that His Word can work miracles.

## THE BIBLE QUESTIONS US

*Some reflections from Latin America*

RUDOLF OBERMÜLLER

*Professor in Union Theological Seminary, Buenos Aires*

What are the future prospects for Christianity ? Is there more hope for Roman Catholicism, Protestantism or Orthodoxy ? These are questions which are constantly being asked of us, if we do not ask them of ourselves. Perhaps our whole commitment to Christianity consists of answering the questions which it raises, and we do not want to be too hasty in merely giving the current answers. In each case we need an answer that is our own answer, at least when, as should be the case, the question is also our own, or when the question is related to an uneasiness which we sense in ourselves. Is there any point in bringing such questions to the Bible ? Can we assume that we will find there ready answers ?



It could well be that we will find no answers at all, if we come first and foremost with our questions. For instance, there is nothing in the Bible about the future of Christianity. It has no regard for such a way of asking questions. Instead it questions the questioner, asking him how he sees his own future: it wants to know how he expresses the fact that the whole meaning of his today, each moment he lives, is drawn from tomorrow, from eternity; how he assumes responsibility for his life and justifies it before the judgment of the God who is to come; how he lives in expectation of the future which belongs to Christ. It is only after answering these questions that it is possible to say anything biblical about the future prospects of Christianity.



*Private Bible study at the Latin American Leadership Training Course.*

So it is not a case of us asking questions and the Bible answering them. It is just the opposite: the Bible questions us and we have to answer. It is always God Himself, and God alone, who has the first and the last word, and we can call it good fortune (we might also call it grace) when we are brought into the conversation and may listen and answer.

So in the last analysis there is only one appropriate way to do Bible study, and that is through such active listening and answering as takes place in the liturgy in a worship service—in the invocation, praise, confession of sins, prayer and intercession. Moreover, our personal and group Bible study will become existential only if we act in the consciousness that we are members of the whole Body of Christ.

Therefore it will be of very little value if we merely set ourselves the task of reading each year the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation. In so doing we may marvel and be greatly moved, but the day will come when we will begin to reflect and to find ourselves puzzled. This is what makes us ripe for Bible study. Up until this point we were in control of the Bible : we knew in advance more or less what it could say. But now it is in control : we no longer know in advance what questions it will raise or what we can produce from our supply of answers. Only when we are shocked by finding ourselves questioned does the Word begin really to speak. How often Luther insisted on this !

The "Holy Scriptures" are God's Word. We will never comprehend to what extent God makes difficult our reading of the Bible in order to reveal Himself to us — to make Himself really known even where He is veiled. On the contrary, we always desire naively that God's Word be so plain in the Holy Scriptures that we can recognize it through simple reading and find there ready-made answers to our questions. Pious as this desire is, it is godless. What would God be then ? Only a teacher, a guide, a Greek philosopher with a book in his hand, whose thoughts only are important.

But God, as the Bible shows Him, is One who acts, the Lord of History, the Creator of Events, the Giver of a Covenant, the Father of Jesus Christ, who sends the power of the Holy Spirit on His community. He has claims on us because we are His creatures and He has offered us His covenant. He is, as Pascal says, "not the God of the philosophers, but the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob". How could the Word of such a God be written in a book ? His Word of Power, His Word of Creation, His Word of Judgment can at best only be reflected, as the foam on the waves of the sea suddenly catches the light. The creature is never the creator, the gift never the giver. They can be only tokens. The Bible is no exception to this. Therefore our Bible study can only do justice to what the Bible is about when we let God be God, when we submit ourselves to the Bible and do not stand before, beside, or even above it.

This has quite definite consequences for our Bible study. Two things must happen when we read the Bible : the contents must become contemporary, and we must respond to its claim and its authority to bear witness to the truth of God and to command our obedience. We determine by the preconceptions with which we read it the nature and extent of its relevance and authority for us.

We try in many ways to make the Bible relevant to and understandable for today. New translations in modern language, like the remarkable English effort, *Letters to Young Churches*, are produced, but they do not lead us any further than to the Holy Scriptures. We publish Bible study outlines and organize groups around present-day questions, such as "Our Economic System in the Light of the Bible". But here again it is man who asks the questions and commands answers from God for the benefit of the economists, and this is not the way. Biblical anthologies are produced, with the contents selected for specific purposes, such as the *Stuttgart Bible for Young People*, from which everything of purely archaeological interest is omitted. Why not also try to produce a Bible for students ? But here again man, with his present-day questions, is in the foreground. The attempt of French



students to dramatize portions of the Bible in such a way that every member of the group plays a role in the biblical story or thinking, is worthy of note. It has the methodological advantage of forcing each participant to identify himself with someone who is struck by God's Word, be it Judas or the sinner of Psalm 51. But there is still a danger here that this could remain merely an aesthetic appreciation. The Bible becomes truly contemporary only when we respond with a real decision of our own to the claim that it brings to us the Word of God.

We had a discussion on this question recently in Buenos Aires. The participants were amazingly unanimous in declaring that they were first forcibly struck by one passage in the Bible, and from that time on the rest of it became significant for them. This had been the experience of both fundamentalists and modernists. But is this not another case of man putting himself above the Bible? Were not the decisive factors there the pious approach and the overwhelming experience, with the Word of God as merely a confirmation of the experience?

In the Bible it is the other way around, and this reversal should revolutionize our attitude towards the Bible and our Bible study. Calvin described his sudden conversion as a liberation from his preconceptions of Roman origin to submission, understanding and "teachableness". This kind of liberation is what is needed. We must all be thus liberated, whatever the prejudices we have inherited as a result of our confessional origin, or whatever the confessional convictions we may have consciously acquired and which may hold us prisoner.

From this point of view it is one of the most promising signs of our time that today in many countries the Bible has become a very widely read book in the Roman Catholic Apostolic Church, and that in the ecumenical movement also questions about the Bible have gained a new and burning significance. Dogmas have given way to the living Word. The skeleton of systematics has once again been clothed with the muscles and nerves of reality. Men who could never be united around one of the many different altars find themselves together in the circle around the table of the Bible study groups of the Student Christian Movement. The Bible questions and we begin to answer. We learn again from one another, because we all stand together under the claim that is laid upon us by the powerful Word of God.

Therefore in our Bible study groups we must be very careful that we submit ourselves to the discipline of listening to what is said there. We jump much too easily from such concepts as peace, church and future, to images constructed by our own desires and fears, and talk about our own concerns, whereas we should first determine whether the Word of the Bible identifies itself with our own conceptions, or whether, coming from God, it turns them upside down. We find too easily what we are looking for in the Bible, or we always come back to the book which we prefer, as Luther did to the Epistle to the Romans, and as we tend to do today to Ephesians, and then we decide what subject God should speak about. On the contrary, we should always keep in mind the fact that our knowledge is fragmentary, that God is always greater than our hearts, and that the Word of God is not bound. If we take this attitude, we can rejoice now in the Word of God in the freedom that Christ gives us, while we wait for the day when we will no longer see "in a glass darkly, but then face to face".

# COMMUNIQUÉ

*The following communiqué is issued jointly by the International Union of Students and the World's Student Christian Federation.*

On June 23-24, 1953, representatives of the International Union of Students and the World's Student Christian Federation met in Vienna on official instructions from their respective organizations to discuss questions relating to:

1. Peace, with special reference to students.
2. Student relief.
3. The role of the university in society.

The purpose of the meeting was to give an opportunity to the two organizations to become better acquainted with each other's views and convictions on these three questions and to consider any possibility of constructive cooperation in these three areas.

## I. *Peace*

We shared the conviction of the urgency of peace — positive peace, not alone the absence of political and military conflict — as the most immediate concern and need of the student community. It is *possible* and *necessary* to hope for peace. Both this constructive attitude and its expression in action are the marks of a responsible student in the present situation.

While holding different views on the present world situation, we strongly repudiated the idea that war is inevitable. We affirmed the possibility of peaceful coexistence of different political, economic and social systems in the same world and the necessity, on the political level, of solving conflicts of interest through negotiations. We were glad to note an increasing atmosphere of hope in this respect in the present world situation and in the relations between the great powers.

Our conversations have manifested a willingness in both delegations to participate in a confrontation — vigorous and positive — involving many different opinions, views and convictions on peace. Such confrontation is constructive and should be encouraged, not only among our constituencies, but wherever possible.

We agreed to propose to our governing bodies a larger consultation on the theme of peace, dealing with the following questions:

1. The positive meaning of peace, with special reference to cultural and educational development.
2. National independence and great power relations in relation to justice and peace.
3. The responsibility of the student community.

We shall recommend to our governing bodies that this consultation be held within a year and include representatives or spokesmen from other international and national student organizations and milieux.

## II. *Student relief*

We shared a profound conviction that the acute needs of students in many countries demand a considerable development of relief activities.



Therefore we are concerned about the division which exists in this field. Two principles upon which unity may be achieved are the following :

1. Relief activities should be only concrete, and bring all students together. Combining relief with other activities creates the danger that relief can be used or considered as a means of propaganda.

2. Relief activities should aim to develop self-help and exclude any attitude of "charity". This calls for active participation and support of students and their representative organizations in student relief.

We suggest to our governing bodies that they look towards the implementation of the following practical steps with reference to the relations between International Student Relief and World University Service :

1. The creation of joint distributing committees in South Africa and, with the agreement of the local unions, in some Southeast Asian universities.

2. The organization of common fund raising campaigns in various countries.

3. The organization of a common program planning instrument.

We express our profound hope that both the next Assembly of W.U.S. and the next working committee of I.S.R. will take the necessary steps to create the conditions of unity in student relief.

### III. *University in society*

Attention was given to the present situation in the universities of the world. It was recognized that often this situation is far from satisfactory and in certain cases goes to the extent of a crisis. A careful study of this situation is needed : it can be fruitfully carried out in a cooperative way and a constructive solution to the present problem largely depends on the extent of this cooperation. This implies for student organizations and individual students an immediate responsibility.

Our discussion led us to underline the importance of the following points :

1. The university is both rooted in, and responsible to, society.

2. Free access to the university regardless of race, nationality, social origin, material resources, political opinions and religious convictions, as well as provision of adequate facilities for students, are indispensable to the function of a true university.

3. The function of the university is not simply professional training, but preservation and development of education, culture and science in the service of mankind and society.

4. Infringement upon academic freedom and rights and perversion of culture, science and education are detrimental to the proper functioning of the university.

Having seen the importance of these points we maintain that it is necessary to pursue conversations about them through a broad exchange of correspondence and articles, internationally, nationally and locally, and at a later stage through a joint consultation.

\* \* \*

The very friendly atmosphere of our meeting and the results reached in our two-day consultation make us hopeful for furthering contact and exchange between our two organizations.

For the International Union  
of Students delegation  
GIOVANNI BERLINGUER  
I.U.S. General Secretary.

For the World's Student Christian  
Federation delegation  
PHILIPPE MAURY  
W.S.C.F. General Secretary.

# FEDERATION AROUND THE WORLD

## Germany

We know you will all rejoice to hear that many of the leaders of the Church and S.C.M. in Eastern Germany, who had been arrested, have now been released, among them Pastor Hamel of Halle, and Johannes Althausen, Travelling Secretary of the Studentengemeinde in 1951-52.

\* \* \*

## Great Britain

### *The University - A Divided Community*

When the Studentengemeinde of Goettingen University and the S.C.M. of St. Andrews came together for their pre-sessional conference, it was to prove that the barriers which separate us are slight; that the universities really do form a community, even although it sometimes appears so painfully divided. Since the war there has been a link between the two universities, but this was the first time that the German students had been able to come to Scotland.

At first, the emphasis naturally fell upon the difference between our two groups—the language, which caused occasional confusion and frequent merriment; the different university systems by which the Germans move from university to university during the course of their student days, while we entrench ourselves firmly in one place, and the discussion over the breadth of vision acquired by the first means and the depth of loyalty by the second; their evangelistic campaigns round the countryside on bicycles, and playing trombones; the difference between their Student Congregation, which embraces all Protestants in the university, and in their case was composed almost entirely of Lutherans, and our more interdenominational group. Soon, however, we had acquired enough factual knowledge of our several backgrounds to be able to

discuss together. The Britons soon came to realize how their vision was limited, that where we talk rather glibly of the disunity of the university community, the breakdown of communication between members of different faculties, between dons and undergraduates, between the Christian and non-Christian groups, it is not that the Germans fail to see these questions, but rather, far overshadowing them is the split between Eastern and Western Germany, and the almost total collapse of any intercourse between them. Again, in discussing the place of the university in modern society, we could pose questions by no means entirely theoretical, as to the autonomy of the university or the right of its community to direct the work undertaken in its universities; in Eastern Germany there is no room for questioning. The state decides what shall be studied and by whom. Compulsory courses on Marxism must be passed and well passed, or else it may mean the end of a student's academic career.

After five days at this conference, the whole group went on to St. Andrews, where the Goettingen students were temporarily incorporated into the university life, attending lectures in the colleges, joining in university services and extra-academic activities, and in the coffee shops, carrying on the discussions begun during the conference. And, of course, they sang. They sang on every conceivable occasion, and very beauti-



fully. It will be a long time before we forget them as they stood round a large campfire which illuminated the darkness of the night around, singing vespers; or at one of our "ceilidhs" singing folk-songs between the Scottish dances.

But the outstanding feature of the conference was the manner in which two very different sets of people, each forming a self-contained unit, managed to achieve a real unity. Representatives of two nations which only seven years ago had been engaged in mortal conflict, had gathered together, all wearing the cross of the World's Student Christian Federation, and had been made one.

From *The Student Movement*,  
magazine of the British S.C.M.

### Greece

A day-long program for the Universal Day of Prayer for Students was organized in Athens by the S.C.U. and S.C.A. and other groups. In the morning the Archbishop of Athens celebrated the Holy Liturgy in the cathedral, with singing by the S.C.U. choir. The service, which was broadcasted, was attended by the Minister of Education, the Mayor and members of the Council of Athens, the Rector, Vice-Rector and many professors of the university and other educational institutions, and vast numbers of students. Following the Holy Liturgy, there was a service of commemoration for students fallen in war, and a procession to the monument to the Unknown Soldier, where the president of the Student Union of Athens gave a short address. In the afternoon men students distributed literature in Constitution Square, while the girls visited hospitals and sanatoriums with reading material and candy for sick students. At an assembly in the evening the Rector of

the University talked briefly, and the Dean of the Theological School spoke on the meaning of prayer. The choir of the S.C.A. provided music.

During the day the Rector of the university also spoke on the radio on the significance of the Universal Day of Prayer for Students.

### Indonesia

At a five-day student camp held in Ento Ento, a village thirteen kilometers from Djokjakarta, the S.C.M. of Gadjja Madha University has held some very successful evangelistic meetings. The area is reportedly solid Moslem, with only twenty families making up the Protestant Church in Ento Ento. Yet four thousand villagers came to the meeting, first to see a movie, then to take an active part in singing, prayer and listening to the preaching by the young minister of the church. The same happened the following evening in the neighbouring village of Kebonagum, where there are ten Christian families.

The students were guests of the church members during the camp. On Pentecost police officers, village heads and many non-Christians attended five-hours of services with lunch served by the church members. One non-Christian camper became ill and was forced to return to Djokjakarta. But the following day she came back to rejoin her companions on the platform, participating in the services and actively associating herself with the evangelistic meetings. The event was publicized in the Djokjakarta newspapers and over the radio. Said the students at the close, "We now have the vision of evangelism. We will continue." The camp was planned by S. C. M. Fraternal Secretary Itty from Madras, India, on the basis of experience in the Indian S. C. M.

# INTERCESSIONS

Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts : and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and reverence. I Peter 3 : 15.

This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth ; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein : for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. Joshua 1 : 8.

Let us pray for truly grateful hearts that the Word of God has spoken to us. Let us pray for understanding minds that we of this student generation may know the ground of our faith, the reason of our hope, and that we may hear and grow in the knowledge of His Word.

Almighty and most merciful God, who hast given the Bible to be the revelation of thy great love to man and of thy will and power to save him, grant that our study of it may not be made vain by the callousness or carelessness of our hearts, but that by it we may be confirmed in penitence, lifted to hope, made strong for service, and above all, filled with the true knowledge of thee and of thy Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

Let us pray for Bible study groups in all the Student Christian Movements, that the spirit of God may dwell amidst them, and that they may hear and understand the message of the Bible.

Let us also remember before God the publications programs of these Movements, since tracts and pamphlets containing texts from the Bible often unaided bring people to a decision to learn more about Christ and to accept Him.

For the word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Heb. 4 : 12.

O God, whose will it is that we should know the truth, guide us, we pray thee, as we seek in these days to find the truth. Free us from all pride and prejudice. Make us sincere in our search, honest in our dealings with ourselves, and ready to abandon the old that we see to be wrong for the truth that is new. And if in our quest we should hear thee calling us to a way of life that involves the surrender of dear ambition, the facing of misunderstanding and long years of sacrificial service, give us, we beseech thee, strength of will and courage of heart to obey thy voice, and to be loyal to it all our days, knowing that thou who hast called us art also working in us, and wilt continue with us to the end. Amen.

Let us remember in our prayers the various summer events of the W.S.C.F., and of the national S.C.M.s in the northern hemisphere. Let us pray that the Word of God may come with power afresh among students through these meetings.

O Lord Jesus, let not thy word become a judgment upon us, that we hear it and do it not, that we know it and love it not, that we believe it and obey it not. Thou who with the Father and the Holy Spirit livest and reignest world without end. Amen.